

## **Tie a Yellow Ribbon by ghostlin**

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**Summary:**

It takes Jonathan a while to realise what feels strange.

## **Tie a Yellow Ribbon**

### **Author's Note:**

I finished Stranger Things and couldn't ignore my brain rhythmically banging pots and pans together shouting WHY CAN'T THEY ALL JUST BE TOGETHER??? Which I thought was a very salient point and so. I decided to write it.

It takes Jonathan a while to realise what feels strange.

As Christmas came and went, they decided unanimously to pack away all twenty six boxes of Christmas lights. At first he thinks it might be that; the living area without hundreds of glowing bulbs hanging from the ceiling feels dull and featureless.

But this is his home. The dim, warm familiarity settles itself back over him and his mother as they fold Will close to them, at first, before reluctantly letting him pedal out into the late afternoon sunlight.

After a while, the Christmas lights start to take on the vague form of a bad dream; this strangeness is new, and unfamiliar.

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He likes the store.

He likes the shopping carts with screwed up wheels, the rows of cans and cleaning products, the freezers full of pre-prepared meals, the thin fluorescent strips of white lighting that he tracks along the floor, sneakers dirty against the linoleum.

He's thinking about this, and the meagre shopping list in his back pocket that his mother had pressed into his hand earlier, her dark eyes wide, that the clash of another cart against his make him jump.

The owner of the other cart stares. He'd been coming from around the corner, and Jonathan had been staring at the floor, so they'd crashed blindly into each other.

"Oh."

It's Steve Harrington.

Jonathan blinks. "Uh. Sorry."

Steve smiles, backing up his cart and steering it around, coming up alongside Jonathan's. "It's cool, man. Pre-New Years' grocery blast, huh? My mom's gone crazy, too."

It takes him a second to remember. New Year's Eve in two days. Right. He thinks of his mom at home, lingering like a deer caught in headlights, her slim hand wrapped around the doorframe.

"Yeah," he mutters, when he realises Steve's probably expecting a response. "Yeah, sure."

Steve rubs a hand against the back of his neck, ducking his head. "Well. See you on the flipside, I guess."

When Jonathan says nothing, he pushes his cart past. He's halfway down the aisle when something clicks.

"Wait," Steve pauses, glancing back. Jonathan's hand curls into his jacket pocket, fingers tracing the lens cap of his new camera. "Thanks. For... thanks."

Steve smiles hesitantly. "It's nothing, man."

Jonathan watches him turn away, like he's internally torn over something. He turns back. It's very sharp, the angle of his jaw in this light. "Hey. You doing anything for New Year's?"

"Not really."

"Me and Nance were gonna go up to the junkyard, maybe get a bonfire going... wanna come with?"

The way Steve says it, it sounds kind of hopeful, like he means it, even.

“Uh, is Tommy going?”

Steve grimaces. “I don’t really hang out with those guys any more. After... you know.”

“Ok,” Jonathan taps his fingers over the edge of the cart. “Um...”

He watches Steve grin. “Ok? You’ll be there?”

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He manages to convince his mom that he’s actually going to meet some friends and that he’s not just skipping out on New Year’s to hang out on his own in the woods.

As he climbs up the track, he can hear the faint crackle of a radio. Nancy and Steve’s silhouettes are small among the hulking carcasses of buses and cars, piled up indiscriminately against the night sky.

“Jonathan,” Nancy’s face lights up on seeing him, her face pale in the gloom. “Please explain to Steve we need more kindling.”

“Hey, you bought --” Steve starts forward, Jonathan offers him the can of gasoline he’s bought. “Perfect. This is perfect.”

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He and Steve get the bonfire started while Nancy drags a couple more

logs closer, spreading blankets out on the ground. The stars are bright out here, even more close packed than the sky outside Jonathan's house.

"Glad you came," Steve mumbles, grinning. "What changed your mind? You seemed kinda... hesitant."

Jonathan thinks about the strange feeling, thinks about the store, about how it seemed ok, all of a sudden. He and Nancy and Steve, he can't figure out a way to communicate the *rightness* that is them, mismatched as they are.

Instead, he gives Steve his lighter. The logpile is ablaze, and Nancy comes up between them, slinging one arm around Steve's waist, and one over Jonathan's shoulders.

"Is it weird that I brought marshmallows?" Nancy bites her lip.

Jonathan shrugs. "Is it ok that I brought beer?"

Steve gives him a high five. Nancy rolls her eyes.

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As the fire dies down to its embers, they lie back on the blanket and watch the smoke curling up into the stars. There a couple of empty beer cans next to them; Steve crumples one up absent mindedly as Nancy traces the scar on the palm of Jonathan's hand.

"Does it hurt?"

"No," Jonathan whispers. "Does yours?"

"Sometimes. I think it's psychosomatic. I worry, you know -- about Mike --" Steve drops the can, takes her other hand in his. Nancy gives a shuddering sigh. "It's like I'm still waiting for something to happen. Like it's not over."

Jonathan watches their hands, the pads of Nancy's fingers against his, their fingers interlocking. He glances up at Steve, but Steve is just watching them sleepily. "I know. I mean, it's the same. With Will."

They listen to the radio static, faint cheering, a thousand miles away from here.

"It's ok," Steve says suddenly. "I'm here. You guys," his arm curls around their heads, brushing Jonathan's hair. "I got you."

When Nancy leans in to kiss him, Jonathan startles.

"It's ok," she whispers, and he can see that Steve is nodding. Her fingers find his jaw, tilting his chin. "It's ok."

She tastes like smoke, and her mouth is cold in the night air. After a moment he thinks, *yes*, kisses back, his fingers sliding into her hair.

He smiles; she feels it, pulling away, kissing his cheek and grinning.

"What?"

"I don't know. Isn't this kinda weird?"

"You guys caught a monster in a bear trap," Steve murmurs. "You saved me from said monster. Nancy shot it, I hit it in the face with a baseball bat, and you lit it on fire. And *this* is weird."

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The ball drops at midnight, and then it's *Steve* who leans in to kiss him.

When he grips Steve's jacket collar, feeling for Nancy's hand in the dark, the strangeness starts to resolve itself, fading away completely.